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New King Assassination Hearings To Be Televised

By Paul Scott

WASHINGTON—James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Dr. Martin Luther King, is going to finally get his chance to tell his story over nationwide TV and radio — that is if he still wants the national forum.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations is offering Ray the top billing in five days of public hearings set to begin on August 14 into the King assassination and the handling of its investigation by the FBI and local and state law enforcement officials in Tennessee.



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Since his public admission of guilt and life sentencing in a Tennessee State Court, Ray personally has hinted in letters to members of Congress, including Sen. James Eastland, D. Miss., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, that others were involved in the King Assassination.

When contacted in the past, however, Ray has refused to testify unless allowed to come to Washington and appear publicly before a Senate or House Committee without having first to reveal his proposed testimony in advance of the hearing.

With no way to check out the accuracy of what Ray

might say in advance of his public appearance, members of Congress including Senator Eastland have shied away from giving the convicted killer a national forum.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D.O., chairman of the Select Committee on Assassinations, has now sent word to Ray that he can testify on his terms. Although Committee investigators have questioned Ray in his prison cell, they still don't have any idea of what he will say.

The Committee's invitation to Ray was indicated in a memorandum which Representative Stokes is circulating to members of Congress. In detailing plans for a series of public hearings in the fall, Representative Stokes reported:

"The schedule now contemplates holding approximately 20 days of hearings into each assassination. The first five days of the public hearings planned are on the assassination of Dr. King. These hearings will commence on the 14th of August. The hearings will be concerned with Dr. King's activities in Memphis in 1968, his assassination and the involvement if any, of Mr. James Earl Ray in the assassination. An effort will be made to secure the testimony of Mr. Ray in public sessions at that time. Other hearings will involve the assassination of President John Kennedy."

OTHER INVOLVED IN SLAYING — By including the words "if any" in the sentence regarding the involvement of Ray in the assassination, Representative Stokes has raised

speculation that his committee may be planning to show that others were responsible for the killing of King.

When questioned by several of his colleagues, Representative Stokes refused to confirm or deny whether Committee probes have uncovered new evidence that would involve others in King's assassination. All the Cleveland Democrat will say is that field investigations are continuing.

The Committee's inquiry already has ranged over three continents with investigators retracing Ray's travelings abroad following the King assassination. Ray was arrested in London after returning from Portugal. The Committee's inquiry already has cost more than \$2.5 million.

While Committee probes have reviewed all of the FBI's investigative reports on the King assassination, they still have not sought permission to examine hundreds of other FBI's documents and tapes on the 1968 activities of King and associates which a federal judge ordered sealed in February, 1977.

A number of these documents and tapes deal with known secret communists, who were closely associated with the Civil Rights leader shortly before his assassination. Since these persons were deeply involved in the planning of King's activities and knew his movements in Memphis, the documents should be examined for possible new leads in the tragic slaying.

The U.S. Federal Court here was petitioned to have these

documents and tapes sealed by officials of the Southern Christian leadership conference, which King headed at the time of his slaying. The reasons they gave for their request was that the information involved King's private life and contacts and was gathered by FBI monitoring.

If the Committee is to thoroughly explore the activities of King and these associates in Memphis during the period before his assassination, FBI sources say the lawmakers must obtain permission from the Court to examine these documents and tapes because of the information they contain.

THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION — The Stokes Committee has scheduled 18 days of public hearings in September to consider evidence uncovered in the assassination of late President Kennedy.

While Chairman Stokes isn't saying anything public other committee members reveal privately that none of the new information obtained by their staff so far upsets the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin.

The investigations of both the Kennedy and King assassinations by the Stokes Committee is expected to be completed by the end of the year. A final report is expected to be made to the full Congress early in 1978.

James Earl Ray's public testimony could be a major factor in shaping both the tone and content of the Committee final report on the assassination of King.

ENCLOSURE

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